

Ryder reflects on talk-radio life

by Wanda Stanford
staff writer

"I have only one hobby and this is it," Max Ryder said, leaning back in his seat behind an impressive desk.

Ryder, the general manager of Virginia Commonwealth University's radio station, WVCW, spent the past two years transforming WVCW into a respectable college radio station.

He did not become general manager overnight. In fact, Ryder has pursued opportunities for experience and exposure since he was 12.

In 1982, Ryder passed a screen test to become a "For Kid's Sake" kid for WWBT-TV, but did not pursue a broadcasting career in front of a camera because he said he has "a face for radio."

Mike Friedman, engineer for WVCW, has worked with Ryder for three years. Friedman explained that the general manager who preceded Ryder was disorganized and the image of the station reflected that.

"Max came in and gave the station his full attention," Friedman said. "He put in a lot of overtime."

He added that although the transformation was a group effort by the staff, Ryder initiated innovations.

The School of Mass Communications faculty and the Student Media Commission rewarded WVCW for the staff's professionalism. This enabled the station to buy sorely needed equipment and move to the first floor of the New Academic Building in August 1991.

Ryder said the facilities, which now include a permanent library of music, are top-notch.

"The walls of my office are even padded for soundproofing, which is good because I frequently find myself bouncing off them," Ryder said.

WVCW's format is modern rock. The station has been criticized for being conservative, compared to the University of Richmond's WDCE and other college radio stations.

"Because we don't get much money from the university, sponsorships do affect our programming" since businesses advertise in radio stations that reach a mainstream audience, "but WVCW is still 'on the cutting edge,'" Ryder said. "We play the newest singles by The Cure, U2 and The Sugarcubes and we have no indication that we shouldn't."

Both Friedman and Ryder describe the new WVCW as a professionally managed student organization.

"We aren't a bunch of renegade (disc jockeys) who just go on the air and do whatever we want to," Ryder said. "We prepare our DJs for what they can expect at a real station."

Ryder said he is committed to preserving WVCW as a vehicle for providing students with the experience they will need in the "real world."

Ryder said he learned from experience the hands-on skills students need to succeed in the radio business. He has been

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working at WRXL, one of Richmond's leading radio stations, since 1988.

WRXL was not his first radio job. Ryder said he was one of those kids who always knew what he wanted to do.

"When I was little I used to play records and announce the song," he confessed.

On Easter 1986 his mother arranged for him to work the control board for the Sunday Church Broadcast on WBBL. This provided him with his first technical experience.

During his junior and senior years at Henrico High School, Ryder was a DJ for the school's radio station. His senior year he was also the program director.

It was during high school when Ryder found inspiration in Kidd Krocket, a DJ for local radio station Lazer 93.

"He did the Top Nine at 9 and you could call in and announce a song, except I would call in every night," Ryder said. Kidd Krocket's assistant began to recognize Ryder's voice.

"I kept calling until they finally let me start hanging out at the station," he said, "I did glamorous jobs like waxing the van."

Ryder volunteered at WVCW for two years before becoming general manager.

He chose to study at VCU because of the accredited mass communications program. Since Ryder grew up in Lakeside, a suburb of Richmond, VCU was economical and allowed him to stay close to his family.

"My parents have always been very supportive of my career," Ryder said.

He will graduate in May with a bachelor's degree in mass communications, in the broadcast news track. Although his post-graduation plans are up in the air, Ryder will be leaving VCU with more than a diploma.

"Looking back, I'm very satisfied with the work I have done here at WVCW," Ryder said.